

CDFA Ag Visioning Session of July 1, 2008
Submitted from Lisa Bodrogi, Co-President of Santa Maria Chapter of CWA
Employee of Teixeira Farms and long time Advocate for Agriculture

1. What is your vision for California agriculture by 2030?

My vision is two-fold.

A Vision of Hope:

My vision of hope for agriculture by 2030 is a vibrant and healthy agricultural economy. Where our farm fields and ranches are actively producing food and fiber to our country and the world. Where, once again, mother-nature is the only element causing challenges to their production yields. Where elements of public policy, environmental protection, social equity, and animal rights no longer threaten our agriculturalists but rather work hand in hand with our farmers and ranchers. My vision includes practical and sound solutions to address public health and welfare issues such as: food safety, water and air quality, energy consumption, and labor and immigration reform. A world where social and environmental equity is based upon sound science that takes into account our human needs and conditions as a part of the ecosystem. Where agriculture of all types, whether commercial, hydroponic, organic, meat, poultry, dairy, field or nut crop, wine or flowers, is all regarded and respected as productive agriculture, a part of our roots and heritage, too valuable to loose in our country.

My Vision of Fear:

My fear is that agriculture in our country will be all but non-existent; that any food or fiber that is produced in our country will be under cover, in small and confined areas. Our children will learn about agriculture in their history books and the place of origin where their food comes from in geography class. Our government will struggle with the escalating cost of food and our American families will need to make tough choices on the quantity and quality of food they are able to put on their tables. Annual vaccinations will become necessary to avoid food borne diseases from food produced in other counties lacking the same high standards for food safety and quality assurance. Wars will eventually break out over food and production rights and territorial boundaries. Sounds hauntingly familiar doesn't it?

2. What will be the biggest challenge in achieving that vision?

Striking equal weight among competing resources to be sure we can continue to provide healthy and wholesome food produced in our country. Bottom line is agriculture is our food system. Agriculture needs water, land and labor to survive. We need water, air and food to survive. That makes agriculture as important to us as the air we breathe and the water we drink. We need to develop public policy based upon environmental, social, and **economic** principals that keep are farmers farming. If they farm, we eat. It's that simple.

3. What is a “must have” in an Ag Vision for California?

We must have public policy that ensures availability of water, land, and labor is sufficient to allow our farmers and ranchers to continue to produce. As competition for these resources get more severe the threat to agriculture becomes more severe. We must have stronger policies at the local, state, and federal levels to balance resources of land and water more equitably towards agriculture and develop proactive immigration reform that secures our borders yet allows for fair and equitable farm labor programs.

Agriculture should not be viewed as dispensable, but rather irreplaceable. It should no longer be considered the sacrificial lamb over housing demand and competing resource issues. It should no longer be our dumping grounds for undesirable land uses, such as trash/waste disposal, sewage treatment, and jail sites to name a few; 3) Ag should be viewed as a partner in environmental stewardship as a bank for carbon sequestration, alternative energy solutions (wind, solar, water, and natural gas). Ag should be given credit for the stewardship that has already occurred and **real incentives** for the continuation of this stewardship rather than public policy continually re-setting the bar higher and higher, making it nearly impossible for farmers to continue farming.

We have to be more mindful of the unintended consequences of environmental protection and public policy claiming to be in the public interest. We need to reverse the tides that have plant and animal species taking priority over agriculture. I am talking about frogs and salamanders and the like that are on special, threatened, and endangered lists by virtue of their uniquely different genetic strain from every other frog and salamander, plants and animal species that require a lab study or magnifying glass to tell them apart from an identical looking plant or animal. I have nothing against frogs, salamanders, or crawly things – I had them as a kid – and have a tortoise in my backyard today.

But if we are talking about the **public interest**, I would think the public majority would be more concerned about the fate and future of our food supply than a toad or critter or plant that is causing the erosion and decline of agriculture because it carries a slightly different genetic make up than his relative. This is called the process of evolution and we need to recognize that in nature the fittest survive and species, plants and animals have evolved, changed, become extinct, etc. over time. Implementation of the ESA has gone amuck, we need to get back to its intended purpose, as our farmers and ranchers are becoming the next endangered species. In the public interest we should all be concerned with the unintended consequences to our food supply when farmers are deprived of water to feed their crops for the benefit of a fish.

There has to be a better balance of resources with Agriculture at the top, rather than the bottom of the food chain. If we don't get serious about it's protection it will be gone. We will loose agriculture as a resource and become dependent upon other countries to produce our food as we have become dependent upon other countries for fuel, other countries that lack the same standards and regulations to ensure the delivery of safe and healthy foods to our tables.

California agriculture is important. Government, public apathy and media hype of agriculture is reckless and lacks foresight. There needs to be universal recognition of ag's importance coupled with respect (in the form of action) from the government. Public policy calling for environmental protection and social justice, should be developed hand in hand with our farmers and ranchers rather than thwart their efforts.

4. In 2030, how has public perception of agriculture changed?

In 2030, a bright vision is a populace that continues to enjoy food that comes directly from the fertile soils surrounding our communities rather than other countries with little, if any, food safety provisions; meaning healthier, wholesome food to nourish our bodies and families, increasing our health and longevity. A public that recognizes that wetlands, creeks, and riparian habitats continue to remain vibrant due to the stewardship of our local ranchers and farmers, creating home and habitat to much wildlife. A public that recognizes agriculture as the fundamental cornerstone for our state and nation's health, well-being and national security.

Today, California agriculture is feeding the world with the safest, most abundant, diverse and least expensive food supply. We can no longer take this for granted. Today, agriculture is in the fight of its life. We must plan for its future. We must plan on agriculture to remain the powerhouse it is to the economy of our region, state and nation in the year 2030 and beyond.

Submitted by: Lisa M. Bodrogi
Land Use Planner, Teixeira Farms

Co-President of Santa Maria Valley Chapter of CWA

California Women for Agriculture is dedicated to building bridges and ensuring that agriculture continues to be recognized for its contributions to the economy, the lifestyle and most importantly, to the people of California and the entire nation.

"If you eat food and wear clothes you have an interest in Agriculture"...